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### Review of: Fires of Faith

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Eamon Duffy. *Fires of Faith: Catholic England Under Mary Tudor*.

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. xiv + 249 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$28.50. ISBN: 978-0-300-15216-6.1

Given that Duffy — well known for *The Stripping of the Altars* (1992) — does not go out of his way to obscure his Roman Catholicism, his defense of aspects of Queen Mary's regime may generate considerable academic smoke. From the outset, therefore, it is worth being clear that he does not seek to diminish or excuse the burning of more than 280 Protestants during Mary's reign. He is keenly aware of the human misery involved: botched executions are closely described, the author is particularly horrified by the deaths of women, and the work includes among its illustrations seven vivid scenes taken from Foxe. The latter's descriptions of burnings, we are told, cannot be read without evoking pity and revulsion.

The overall thrust of the book is that Mary's regime was not incompetent (as it is often depicted) and the knowledge that it did not eventually succeed in its aims should not encourage a sense of inevitability. Duffy's key figure is Cardinal Pole, whom he seeks to rescue from a reputation for blandness. Pole is shown to have been at the center of religious policy, acting from a well-articulated agenda that in many ways anticipated the implementation of the Council of Trent. In particular, despite his own difficulties with the papacy, the cardinal was one of the main instigators of the restoration of papal authority. In carrying out this program, his awareness of the importance of capturing hearts and minds inspired the fostering of preaching and pastoral works as well as a direct involvement in the pursuit and execution of heretics. Pole is the hero of the book, but he is no dove.

Duffy surveys some of the Catholic writing of the period, seeking to refute the idea that the Marian church failed to exploit printing in the process of reconversion. Sometimes short quotations are not enough to convince a reader that a particular text is "inspired" or "forceful" (though longer ones would have been out of place); however, the essential point — the amount and variety of Catholic writing — is well made. An instance of this (again, it is argued, at Pole's instigation) was the use of Bishop Fisher and Thomas More as examples of Catholic martyrs. Harpsfield's *Life of More* is "the masterpiece of the Marian martyrdom controversies" (185), a judgment obscured by its not having been published until 1932, possibly because its busy author did not have time to see it into print before Mary died. If this was the case, it is emblematic of Duffy's vision of a regime whose substantial achievements were often curtailed before they reached complete fruition.

The question of the burnings is, Duffy recognises, the most difficult one. When he points out that 270 Protestants were executed in the Netherlands in the late 1560s, or that Elizabeth I strangled and disembowelled 200 Catholics, he is not arguing that Mary's actions can be dismissed as commonplace, or that one monarch was as bad as another. Instead, he emphasizes the moral distance between our judgments and those of the past. People did not automatically react to gruesome executions with visceral antipathy. Burning heretics did not necessarily turn the populace against the authorities. This is Duffy's negative claim, and one persuasively supported. By

definition, his hypothetical claim that the effect of the persecution was such that Mary might have succeeded in suppressing Protestantism had she lived longer will be more controversial. Nevertheless, he marshals level-headed arguments in support of it.

The book ends with a sketch of the various achievements of the Marian church that endured after 1558. Clergy who had conformed under Henry and Edward resisted Elizabeth's restoration of the Royal Supremacy: the fourteen surviving Marian bishops had to be deprived, although one subsequently conformed. Catholic exiles brought Marian influence to the Council of Trent feeding into the mainstream of the Counter-Reformation; thus English Catholicism is not better viewed as separate from that of the Continent.

None of this makes Duffy an unquestioning defender of the Marian Church. Catholics are seen to have had internal differences damaging their cause. From Mary's own viewpoint the decision to burn Cranmer was a grave practical error, probably driven by personal vengeance at the expense of a resounding propaganda coup. Some of the queen's supporters were timeserving, while the popes — whose restoration was a central issue — often left much to be desired: Paul IV, who attacked Pole, was "half-mad," and Julius III created the youthful object of his affection a cardinal.

One good idea justifies a monograph, so it is a testament to Duffy's economy and invention that he advances several provocative and considered theses in less than 250 pages. Inevitably, as he himself points out, lack of space requires that some topics — for example, the universities — cannot receive detailed consideration. Nevertheless, here and there slight elaboration would have been welcome: for instance, what size was the "significant and persistent protestant minority" (161) or the proportion of those burnt that were recidivists?

Duffy's skillfulness is such that if he did not remind readers that most of his arguments contradict, or at least are in tension with, received historical wisdom, it would be very easy to take most of his proposals as modest ones. As it is, readers may find foreshadowings of some of his points elsewhere (Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Reformation* [2003] favors Pole and briefly adverts to the importance of Marian preaching); however, they will not find all of them, and they are not to be found as thoroughly argued and coherently assembled as they are here. In consequence, this will become a standard work vying with its author's previous writing in generating debate and forcing the close reassessments of established opinions. As such, it will be welcomed even by those who find themselves disagreeing with parts of it.

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